

August 21, 2024

TO:

Honorable Bruce H. Hendricks  
U.S. District Judge  
P. O. Box 835  
Charleston, SC 29402

Dear Judge Hendricks,

My name is Andrea, and I am Christina Soda's sister. I am the oldest sister by three years.

It pains me that I cannot be there in court with her on Thursday.

I understand she has plead guilty to wire fraud and am aware of the details of her case.

I do believe everyone needs to be held accountable for their actions.

I truly hope this letter offers you a way to get to know a little about my sister thru my eyes and personal experiences as I strongly feel that this crime does not define my sister. It is so difficult to try and put in words in a brief letter all the life experiences we have shared and those in Christina's life I have born witness to, which I think are essential in understanding and knowing the person she is today.

Christina reminds me in many ways of my dear mother - first and foremost a protector of home and family, an extremely hard worker, a person that cares deeply about others and without hesitation puts others before herself, one who loves humanity, nature, animals and cares passionately about her community.

She is a trained Disaster Recovery Case Worker for the American Red Cross (ARC). I have on occasions overheard her conversations with victims needing assistance. One of the conversations that comes to mind took place in the evening around 20:30 as she was on the phone with an elderly woman and her husband who had just suffered a partial fire in their home. To listen to her speak with so much compassion, empathy, and love to people she does not even know is inspiring. She spends a great deal of time speaking and listening to each person and so much of her own time researching for resources to help them,

I recall hearing her speak recently to a victim of a total loss of home who immediately, after the destructive fire, sadly, suffered from a stroke. She was a single mother of a teenage daughter and had a pet dog as well. I listened to her speak to the victim and check in with her countless times. She guided and assisted the victims with temporary housing, clothing, food, offered counseling for her daughter who was in school and even assisted with searching for resources to help provide for their pet dog. And she followed up several times for an entire month.

You often here or deal with people in these positions read from a script to try and help victims but each and every time, Christina speaks from the heart with an outpouring of authentic care and humaneness.

She has helped so many people in need and made such an impact in their lives. I am so very proud of her. In the face of all she is going thru personally, all she wants to do is help others.

Christina loves being a part of and giving back to the community not only thru her work with ARC. She tends to do things more anonymously. On weekends, I have seen her volunteer to help feed and clothes the homeless with Uplift Charleston (a non-profit organization for Advocacy, Empowerment, + Support of the homeless in our community).

I have also seen her make small personal care packages on her own and go out into the streets to distribute to those without a rook over their heads.

She is a nurturer by nature. I recently watched as she patiently saved a bird that had flown into a screen patio and was hurting itself trying to find its way back out.

She is a kind and gentle soul with absolutely no malice in her heart.

If you have any children, furbabies or pets, I promise you, Christina is the one you would want to babysit/ care for them in your absence. She loves all living beings, she protects, nurtures and she teaches in such a kind and gentle way.

It is truly a lovely thing to bear witness to. She is so very much like my mother in this sense, may she rest in peace.

Christina and I grew up with very similar and parallel childhood traumas occurring both in and outside of a dysfunctional home. Sadly these included verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. She also endured other hardships and trauma throughout her early and adult life. My heart truly breaks to see her in her current situation.

Her journey alone as a mother reads like an unbelievable novel of a mother offering unconditional love in light of one trauma after another. She has spent her adult life loving, guiding, educating, providing for and forgiving (over and over again) her only child who suffered from mental issues due to early childhood exposure to lead poisoning, also ADHD, and sadly drug addiction. She worked so hard to provide for him, she sent him to good schools, exposed him to the arts, sports and so much more.

To hear her recount countless horror stories of going out into the streets at night to search of her son, to even pleading school counselors and police to take him into custody to keep him from harm.

The pain she has endured on her journey as a mother is unimaginable. My nephew is now a 31-year-old recovering drug addict and, the silver lining in this all is that this past year, he seems to have been able to successfully go thru a recovery program, find work with a good company, live on his own without relying on his parents as he continues on this path of healing, growth and self-discovery.

She has suffered so many other traumas in life that have caused her to be a more guarded person and less carefree in life.

Christina is a humble and simple person. She has nothing of great monetary value in her home. She dresses plainly and does not wear or own jewelry apart from a watch. In the past two years, as this case unfolded, she has not gone out to dinner or enjoyed any type of entertainment, vacations, etc. I believe she feels undeserving as a consequence of her actions in the crime she committed.

When Christina finds herself speaking about what she did, she immediately breaks down in agonizing pain mixed with deep shame, regret and remorse. She would like nothing more than to be able to pay her former employer back quickly and in full along with apologize for what she did and the impact it had on WIE. She has always wanted that from day one, even apologizing profusely and offering her employers in writing to begin restitution within days of having lost her job. That letter is available from both lawyers. Her intent has always been clear. I would also add that prior to these past two years, Christina has never been a very emotionally expressive person, always more reserved. She now is easily brought to tears with deep seeded remorse.

As she now lives paycheck to paycheck earning less than half of her former salary, she understands that she will be paying for the rest of her life both literally and figuratively. She realizes she will never be able to put money aside for emergencies, save for healthcare expenses for herself or her pets, save for retirement, and she will always struggle to pay for things like car maintenance or repairs or home repairs.

I cannot imagine the emotional burden she carries knowing this.

The consequences of her actions will follow her and weigh heavily on her for the rest of her life.

Fortunately, by some amazing miracle, she was able to find the most incredibly accepting and caring employers. Her current employers see past her crime and see the person that she is. They have come to appreciate her as a responsible, dedicated and hardworking employee and I believe also accept, love and trust her despite her past crime.

I have ABSOLUTELY NO DOUBT that her former employers at WIE also cared for her and the person that she is very much. She did after all work for them for 20 years before her actions that bring us all together now. She did care for them deeply and will forever feel overwhelming regret and remorse for her actions. She will carry that weight with her always.

Christina has a family that loves and needs her very much. She is the sole financial support for herself, her home and her three fur children (little Layla, Liam, and Lucky). This is also the home for her son to come home to. She works so very hard to provide for a very basic and modest life for them all.

A year ago, I came to stay with my sister after having lived in NC for the previous 18 years. I came for many reasons. I came to try and heal from an overwhelming loss. Christina and I suffered the shattering loss of our mother 4 years ago during the COVID lockdown. It was a sudden and unexpected passing due to pancreatic cancer. I had been her caregiver for many years and we were very close. The isolation during the pandemic coupled with the loss of my beloved mom, crippled me emotionally. Two years later we loss our father to COVID. I have found it very hard to heal from the loss. Since Christina and I are the only family we have left for each other, I have come to stay with her to try to heal and, at the same time to try to help support her as she goes thru this overwhelmingly difficult emotional journey.

The past two years have been emotionally and psychologically difficult for her. She has lived with guilt, shame and remorse for her actions and she carries it all with her daily. She has also lived with the fear of the unknown, which, in of itself can be emotionally crippling.

She fears for her family and her home should she not be able to return to her daily life. She fears losing her employment and losing her car and home due to unemployment. She fears the renewed hardships in trying to find employment once again with a criminal record. She fears having to try and find housing with a criminal record and diminished financial resources. She fears displacement of her family.

She has carried this with her for the last two years. I bear witness to it every day. I see it in her face, I feel it in her energy and I see it in her actions as she desperately searches for ways to atone, be it by saving the little money she has for restitution, by seeking out therapy to further deal with past traumas and understand her actions, by a continued life of self reflection, by continuing to give her self and her time thru volunteering and helping others, by continuing to establish herself again in the workforce.

Added to all the emotional hardships she has already endured as a consequence of her actions, the financial burdens placed upon her are overwhelming. She has accustomed herself to earning less and "making due", she has been setting aside money for restitution for the past two years and now. Unfortunately, WIE has filed a 1099 form which has triggered the IRS and the State of SC to demand hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes. I do not understand any of this, as the amount on the form does not match the amount claimed in court. I have also wondered if the amount claimed in court for restitution takes into account monies that WIE may have

received in insurance claims. Nonetheless, I digress. Christina now has to try and negotiate an exorbitant amount of money owed to the state and federal government and has additionally, and as a direct result of this 1099 filing, had her wages garnished and a lien placed on her home. Unfortunately, this now impacts the amount she is able to pay in restitution.

The consequences of her actions will follow and weigh heavily on her the rest of her life.

Nonetheless, somehow, she gets up every morning and carries on. She is planning to establish a home based baking business to, if successful, assist in paying restitution. She is looking forward to finding a new therapist to assist her on her continued path of self improvement. She has rediscovered her faith and prays constantly for forgiveness from her former employers, forgiveness from her family, she prays for understanding, strength and guidance and she forges forward.

Judge Hendricks, please allow me at this point to thank you most sincerely for taking the time to read my letter and learning a bit more about my dear sister. I know your time is extremely valuable and I am grateful to you.

I also humbly ask, on my sister's behalf, for mercy and leniency.

I am available to confirm the facts in this letter by phone or email at your convenience.

With Kind Regards,

*Andrea Patterson*

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